dexterity has this great idea been demoralised? What have *private houses* to do in the façade of a *British Museum?* Was there no lateral space? Was the less important outline inexorable? Was that one noisy frontage indispensable to the quiet functionaries of the establishment? Or did the *genius loci* demand that visitors, making their periodical pilgrimages, should be kept from transcendentalisms by glimpses of living babies and living nursery-maids, where they thought to see nothing but Greek demigods, mythic bulls, and the dust of Pharaoh?

I shall not waste argument upon the man who does not at once see and feel these incongruities. But I will come down, for the moment, to lower ground. Suppose an architect, like our living Barry in the Houses of Parliament, or our martyred Wilkins in the National Gallery, pestered with pitiful conditions, and compelled to sacrifice artistic feeling, by those who, when public taste is roused, join in the hue and cry and hunt him down. Suppose, I say, an architect, ruthlessly ordered to sacrifice architectural proprieties, and to degrade a public building by the introduction of private apartments,—was it necessary to do it as we find it here? Houses—unmistakeable houses—not incorporated by easy transition into the general plan, but standing apart, in all their commonness, robbing the façade of its due dimensions, protruding themselves,—arrogantly enclosing within their *littleness* what might have folded them within its greatness. What would Wren have said? What may not the least initiated of all your readers that has ever seen his Greenwich Hospital? Here is a whole building, every part of it, save the chapel, habitable, yet all over *palatianized:* Old England's rough but glorious tars more royally lodged than the *savans* of her museum. But I must pass to another point.

Now, I need scarcely premise that whenever a *pediment* is introduced, it should always preserve its prerogatives. Whether viewed in a mere constructive light, or in its conventional character, it is essentially a *dominant feature.* To depress it, or neutralize it, is against all architectural instinct. So the mere *linear* design of the Museum would seem to indicate; for the pediment is not only supported by some of the noblest columns the kingdom can boast of, but rises actually higher than the upper lines of the projecting wings, which have no pediment. This is the *de jure* view. I will call it the *natal* one; for it is plain here, as in too many modern buildings, that the plan was conceived and born, as well as educated, on a flat bodiless sheet of paper; that the purity of certain lines, not the salient majesty of certain masses, was the leading object throughout the process; that, in point of fact, the geometrical and not the actual has characterised everything. Hence what I call our *tea-board architecture.* Now, however, geometrically viewed, the pedimental prerogatives above named were provided for: it seems to have been wholly forgotten that such an aspect, beyond the studio of the architect, is confined to swallows (themselves architects certainly) and the favoured occupants (perhaps not architects) of the attics across the street. As the British nation sees its British Museum, the whole order is inverted; the omnipotent laws of vision put the geometrical *hors de combat;* the projecting wings (not to say the collateral houses) predominate; the pediment sinks; and, what is worst of all, *lines* as well as proportions are altered; the square outline of the wing overrides the triangular outline of the centre; the culminating point no longer culminates; the final loses its finality.

I know the reply. Things are really as the geometrical made them, and the mind realises the real despite the anomalies of the apparent. I will dare to say, "I trow not." "*Esse quam videri*" is beautiful enough in morals. In art we stand on other ground. Art must speak through, and therefore *to* the eye. Things must "*seem,*" if they would "*be.*" I do not plead, of course, for false perspectives and theatric tricks; but it is not enough to say a thing is really done when it is virtually—that is, by force of local circumstances and the laws of vision—*undone.*

I lay the more stress on this case, because, if I mistake not, writing at a distance, the Post-office in St. Martin's-le-Grand, of which the Museum would seem very like a copy or a duplicate, presents, in nine aspects out of ten, the same luckless peculiarity. The characterising, or, as the million will have it, *telling* features, are the projecting squares: the recessed pediment is made mincemeat of.

Let me guard against mistake, ere I proceed. I accuse not the projecting wings. I would not have them recede, and make the centre advance. *Cæteris paribus,* a building will possess twice as much majesty as the wings duly advance, giving concavity to the whole mass, and light and shadow to certain parts of it; enveloping the beholder, and filling the field of vision. Here, if, with the same ground plan, or perhaps the wings made coextensive with the centre, each projecting colonnade had borne its pediment (and it might yet do it), how simple, how harmonious, but how impressive the result!

I become prolix. The remaining point shall not detain us long. The mischief is soon told—easily seen—and, what should not be overlooked in this age of "economists," very costly. I allude to the iron railing.

I hear the exclamation, and perfectly agree with those who think it, in itself considered, very handsome. I am really not fastidious; but I cannot forget a homely proverb—"Handsome is that handsome does." Now what does the railing do? Just what the cast-iron age seems miserably bent on doing elsewhere. Here is the whole of a building, really very imposing, despite the faults I have dwelt on, —wings, columns, victimized pediment, and houses,—caged, like the fabled lion, in an iron netting, only without invocation to mouse or man to set it free. Here is an elaborate screen, so forgetful of its place in architectural society, as almost to quench what it was meant to guard; and this, not only by its extraordinary height, richness, and gilding (gilding iron railings for London smoke!—gilding iron railings in St. Giles's, when we lose golden opportunities of buying gems for our National Gallery for want of money!) but, as if to leave no room for mistake, strengthened by enormous masses of majestic granite, that seem to look disdain on the paltry houses dimly discerned within!

The absurdity ends not here. Passing, in the spring, to the Reading-room, I found some obtrusive but unimaginable process commencing outside the charmed iron boundary; and, on asking what it meant, was pointed to a dirty-looking, villainous, little iron railing that was to go, "railing for railing," outside (beneath the other). Here is certainly "confusion worse confounded." So it turns out that either the handsome railing above was all for *show,* that is, to show itself, but not to show the building I should have thought better worth the looking at,—or else, perhaps, by presenting its little dirty outwork aforesaid to answer that as yet unanswerable but most momentous question, specially pressing in these days of "self-government,"—*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

Sir, I will not longer tax your indulgence. Let me only say, in conclusion, *Architects of the Nineteenth Century, these things ought not so to be.*

LENY.

ELECTRICITY: ITS INFLUENCE AND POWER IN ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE LIFE.

A CORRESPONDENT, "W. G." sends us an essay on this subject, which, however, is, in the main, neither so new nor so conclusive as he appears to regard it. Between some of the phenomena of life and some of those of electricity, there are certainly strong and beautiful analogies, but there are the like analogies amongst the phenomena of electricity, heat, and light; and yet it cannot be decisively ascertained that even these are identical, far less electricity and life. Nevertheless, that all three—electricity, heat, and light,—are intimately associated with vital action, there cannot be a doubt. With these few introductory remarks, we give, without farther comment, what we regard as the strongest points in the essay alluded to:—

"May not that great *binding chain* of the universe—that universal power—that wonder-working principle, whose intensity continues the same at all accessible distances from the earth's surface—'*electricity*'—be also the origin and universal cause of vitality and life, both animal and vegetable, and by which the instantaneous action of thought and feeling is telegraphed throughout the animal frame? Let us inquire; and, by way of illustration, we will take an acorn and an egg. Now, it is well known that neither an acorn nor any other seed will germinate if kept *dry,* nor will an egg produce a chicken at the common temperature of the atmosphere (at least in this country); but both will inevitably perish if their condition be not changed.

The great author of universal creation has inclosed in all seed, whether animal or vegetable, the 'type' of the future structure, and it is only by placing the seed in such a position as will fulfil all the requirements necessary to its growth, that the structure can be organized and developed; and when these conditions are accomplished, electric action generates circulation—physical agents are elaborated into aliment—circulation distributes the aliment throughout the 'type'—the type governs the order and form of the deposit that ensues—and thus is the structure built up and completed.

Hence if the acorn, or a grain of wheat or of any other plant, be buried in *moist* earth, all the requisite conditions necessary to its growth are fulfilled, because we surround the seed with the means from whence the nutriment for the organization and construction of the plant is derived; and the electric circle being also completed by that simple act, such nourishment is distributed by the circulating current generated as has been just pointed out; and this electro-chemical process constitutes in fact the only *vitality* of plants.

The suspended vitality of seeds may be regarded as analogous to the broken galvanic or electro-telegraphic circuit in which the electrical action is suspended; and this valuable property is of the utmost importance in the economy of the physical world, for by it man is enabled to preserve and store up grain, &c. for food, to meet his future exigencies, when but for the suspension of vital action would be impracticable."

THE COST OF DRAINING BANGOR DIFFERENTLY VIEWED.

I TAKE the liberty of forwarding the following list of tenders for draining, as it will be a consolation to some of the London builders that they are not the *only* blind ones. It is cut from the *North Wales Chronicle*:—

Griffith Williams and William Griffiths	£9,182 3 4
Thomas Roberts and William Hay Bowker, Bangor	8,692 10 0
Henry Pace, Bangor	6,381 5 0
Thomas Murphy, Shire-hall-street, Carnarvon	6,343 0 0
William Williams, Bangor	5,526 6 0
Thomas Griffiths, Bangor	4,350 10 0
Owen Williams and Richard Hughes, Bangor	3,584 10 0
Hugh Jones, Glanadda-place, Bangor	2,925 10 0

The tender of Mr. Hugh Jones having been accepted by the Board, he was called in, and informed of the conditions required for the due performance of the contract, to the terms of which he acceded. The works will, in all probability, be finished about the beginning of May next. Tenders for the pipes were also submitted to the Board, who deferred their decision till next sitting. The cost of these will be about 1,750*l.*

A. B.

METALLIC CASKS.—Messrs. Fox, Henderson, and Co. of the London Works, Birmingham, have contracted for the exclusive manufacture of the iron casks, which appear to be chiefly designed for emigration purposes and to carry produce from tropical climates, and especially palm oil from Africa. These casks, it is said, can be put together by the most inexperienced hand in coopering.

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